

One of your classmates, Kara Shirley, knows what I'm talking about. Just 2 months ago, Kara went on a service project to Brazil where she visited an AIDS clinic. The clinic was called Hope and Life. While there, she and the other students helped clean up after the patients, administer their medicine, and just sit by their bedsides holding their hands. One of these patients was a man who weighed just 70 pounds. When he was sent to this clinic, he had already been given his death certificate. But that only told the people at the clinic that this man needed even more love.

Here's how Kara puts it: "This man was so weak he could not even speak. But when I held his hand he turned his head, and you could feel the gratitude. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life—and by the end of my time there, I didn't want to leave." Kara's gesture was a—seemed like a small thing to hold a man's hand. But because it was done with great love, it helped fill a dying man's final days with dignity and grace.

I've met thousands of volunteers like Kara who serve their fellow citizens in many different ways. They put themselves in some of the harshest places in our country and in the world. Yet instead of telling me how hard they have it, they always tell me how fortunate they are.

You can know this joy in your own lives. All you need is a warm heart and a willing pair of hands. When Mother Teresa accepted her Nobel Prize, she told the story about visiting a nursing home. At first she was impressed by the home because it was attractive and well equipped. But she soon noticed that none of the residents were smiling, all were looking at the door. When she asked why everyone seemed so sad, one of the caretakers explained, "They are hurt because they are forgotten." They stared at the door in the hope that it would open and someone who loved them would walk through it.

My challenge to you today is this: Be the person who walks through that door. Be the face that brings a smile to the hurt and forgotten. Lead lives of purpose and character, make a difference in someone else's life. And if you do, you will lead richer lives, you will

build a more hopeful nation, and you'll never be disappointed.

My congratulations to you all. I ask for the Almighty God's blessings on you and your life. Thanks for letting me come and share my thoughts.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:24 a.m. in the Robert S. Carey Student Center. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Douglas R. Nowicki, Archabbot and chancellor, and H. James Towey, president, St. Vincent College; Donald W. Wuerl, Archbishop of Washington; Mary Towey, wife of H. James Towey; and Pope Benedict XVI.

### **Remarks on the Observance of Military Spouse Day and Presentation of the President's Volunteer Service Awards**

*May 11, 2007*

Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. Jeanine, thank you very much for kicking off with—an important event here in the White House. Today we honor six outstanding Americans who represent the very best of what volunteering means, and we honor the achievements of military spouses all across the Nation. You cannot be a nation with a volunteer army unless you honor the military families, and that's what we're doing today.

I like to tell people that the strength of this Nation is not our military, although we intend to keep it strong. The strength of the Nation is the fact that we've got compassionate, decent, honorable citizens who hear a call to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. And that's what we're here to honor.

Each of you is part of a legacy of service that harkens back to our country's earliest days. When Martha Washington—the husband—of the first George W.—[laughter]—organized sick wards for wounded soldiers and made visits to battlefields to boost the morale of the troops, she volunteered for a cause bigger than herself.

Through many conflicts, America's war fighters have counted on their spouses for love and support. Our communities have depended on your energy and your leadership.

Our Nation has benefited from our—the sacrifices of our military families. Today I've asked you to come so I can thank you on behalf of all the military families for your noble and needed service to the United States of America.

Not only am I saying it, but we've got some pretty distinguished group of folks who want to say the same thing. I will speak on their behalf, you'll be happy to hear: Secretary Bob Gates, Secretary of the Defense; Senator John Warner, Senator Craig Thomas, and Senator Mike Enzi; Congressman Chet Edwards—who happens to be President George W. Bush's Congressman from Central Texas—and Congressman Bob Filner have joined us to pay tribute to our military spouses, and I'm honored you all are here.

I also appreciate our military leadership who have joined us today. I can't think, by the way, of many times here in the East Room of the White House that the Joint Chiefs have come to pay tribute. I really can't. We have met before—we meet quite often, as a matter of fact—but never in a setting where we're paying tribute to people such as yourself.

Before I begin with our military leadership, I do want to thank Pete Geren, Acting Secretary of the Army—hopefully permanent Secretary of the Army as soon as the Senate moves his nomination. Pete, thank you for coming.

Anyway, I do want to introduce General Pete Pace, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and his wife, Lynne; Admiral Mike Mullen, Chief of Naval Operations, and his wife, Deborah; General Jim Conway, Commandant of the United States Marine Corps, and his wife, Annette; General George Casey, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, and his wife, Sheila. We appreciate you all coming.

I'm also proud that Mary Jo Meyers, the wife of General Richard Meyers, retired, United States Air Force, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, is with us. And I appreciate Suzy Nicholson—Suzanne Nicholson, wife of Secretary Jim Nicholson, who is the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Thank you all for joining us. You honor us with your presence.

Pretty soon, we'll hear more about the President's Volunteer Service Award recipients. But I do want to thank your families for joining us. I thank members of the Armed Forces who have joined us today. I can't think of a more noble cause than for people to volunteer to protect our country in the face of grave danger. And it is a—I marvel at how fantastic our military is. And the reason why it's good is not only because we're modern and well trained, but we've got such wonderful people who wear the uniform. And we thank you for serving, and I appreciate your families who have joined us as well.

You know better than anyone that military service is a family commitment. As one wife in this audience recently noted, military spouses do not raise their right hands and take an oath of enlistment. Yet their service begins as soon as they say two words: "I do." [Laughter]

Military spouses enter into a life filled with uncommon challenges. One of the award recipients, Linda Port, has been a military spouse for nearly 21 years. Over that period, she has moved into and out of 17 different houses; she has enrolled her children in 9 different school districts. I see some heads that are nodding in recognition of what that means. This kind of life makes it hard to lay down roots, which is why it's so important that military families find strength and stability in each other.

Several of the spouses we honor today have made it their mission to build those needed networks of support. Linda worked as an advocate for 1,200 sailors and their spouses, so they could stay in contact during deployments. Michele Langford runs an association that works to unite Coast Guard spouses in her community. Cindy Bjerke co-chairs the Patriot Family Readiness Group, which provides information and resources to approximately 500 military families. These initiatives are making a difference. They are improving lives. And we're all here to thank you for the care and commitment you have shown for others.

Many military spouses have the added difficulty of spending long periods raising their children alone. Being a parent is hard work

under any circumstances—just ask my mother. [Laughter] Yet military spouses tend to have to go an extra mile. They raise their own families, and they find ways to help others as well. Michael Winton has been the primary caregiver for his daughter while his wife serves in the Air Force. Yet he also found time to coach sports teams, work with Habitat for Humanity and Fisher Nightingale Houses, visit veteran centers, and volunteer for a program that helps kids develop a love of reading.

Denise Rampolla is another example of the kind of person that we're honoring today. She appears to have worked with every civic organization in Cheyenne, Wyoming. [Laughter] Listen to the list: the Greater Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce; the Cheyenne Parks and Recreation Community; the VFW Ladies Auxiliary; the Laramie County Emergency Response Team; and Cub Scout Pack 112. [Laughter] She's what we like to call a hard charger; she gets things done. Maybe we could use a little more of you in Washington. [Laughter]

Other military spouses have tackled personal adversity and used their experience to help others. Shannon Maxwell took on the role of caregiver when her husband, Tim, returned from Iraq with a severe head injury. Shannon took what she learned, got together with other military wives, and formed a support group to help our wounded warriors. They've raised over \$400,000 to help injured service members adjust to new lives and new challenges. And we thank you for what you're doing, Shannon. And we also appreciate Tim for his service in Iraq; glad you're here.

This is just a sampling of the good and important work performed every day by military spouses all across the country. I want you all to know that your work is noticed, your work is appreciated, and your work inspires our country.

Some of my most moving experiences as President have come during my visits with military families. Laura and I have had the privilege of meeting troops and their loved ones at bases all across the world. We've sat beside the bedsides of those who have been wounded in battle. We've met with wives and husbands who have received a folded flag. We have hugged the parents of soldiers lost

in combat. In these meetings, I have found that what motivates our servicemembers most is their love for their families. Oh, they love our country, but they really love their families. You're in their prayers every morning, their thoughts every day, and their dreams every night.

Some time ago, a naval aviator about to deploy to war wrote a letter to his fiancée. This letter may remind you of some of the letters you've received. His words back then were these: "For a long time I had anxiously looked forward to the day when we would go abroad and set to sea, but you have changed all that. I do want to go because it is my part, but now leaving presents itself not as an adventure but as a job."

That letter was mailed more than 60 years ago, addressed to my mother from my father. Millions of similar letters have been written since that war. And most of you likely have one that is special to you that you keep close to your heart.

I know that nothing can compensate for the sacrifices you endure while your spouse is away. And so do—a lot of people in Washington understand that. But you also got to know that our entire country stands with you; we love you, and we respect you. America has seen and survived many wars over many generations. What has remained constant is the love we have for each other, the nobility of duty, and the strength that our men and women in uniform find in their heroes who serve here at home.

And so we honor you today, whether you're in this room or around the United States of America. We thank you for your sacrifices. We thank you for supporting our Armed Forces. And we ask for God's blessings on you and your family.

And now I ask Lieutenant Colonel Floyd to please read the citations.

*[At this point, Lt. Col. Samuel Floyd, USA, Army Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the awards.]*

Thank you all for coming. I wish Laura were here to have been able to greet you. She would be just as impressed as I am today by the wonderful stories and the great compassion of our recipients who, I know if they

had to give a speech, would say they just—they're just doing what they love to do, and they represent thousands who are doing the same thing.

We're honored that you've joined us. May God bless you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:57 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jeanine McDermott, wife of Capt. Michael McDermott, USA.

### **Statement on the Commencement Ceremonies at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia**

*May 11, 2007*

Today and tomorrow, students of Virginia Tech will rise to receive the diplomas they have earned through years of hard work. They can be proud of their academic accomplishments and excited about the opportunities their degrees have opened up for them.

Laura and I salute the Virginia Tech class of 2007. We also remember the students and teachers whose lives were taken last month. They will always hold a special place in the hearts of this graduating class and an entire nation.

Over the past month, our country has witnessed the compassion and resilient spirit of the community at Virginia Tech. That spirit is on display this weekend in Blacksburg, where thousands of friends and family members have gathered to celebrate commencement and pray for this remarkable school. Our Nation joins them in prayer. And on this special occasion, Laura and I send our love and heartfelt wishes to the entire Hokie family.

### **Proclamation 8144—Peace Officers Memorial Day and Police Week, 2007**

*May 11, 2007*

*By the President of the United States of America*

#### **A Proclamation**

In every American community, committed law enforcement officers watch over our

neighborhoods and work to make our Nation a safer, more peaceful place. As we observe Peace Officers Memorial Day and Police Week, we honor the men and women who serve the cause of justice, and we pay tribute to those who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

By taking an oath to serve and protect their fellow citizens, law enforcement officers answer a vital calling and accept a profound responsibility. These extraordinary Americans work to uphold our laws and serve on the front lines in the fight against crime and terrorism.

We owe a lasting debt to those who sacrificed their lives while serving and protecting our fellow citizens. These fallen officers live on in our national memory as Americans whose courage and commitment have shown the true meaning of heroism. We offer our respect and prayers to their loved ones.

On Peace Officers Memorial Day and during Police Week, we recognize and honor the service and sacrifice of the men and women whose devotion to duty brings honor to our system of justice and makes America a better place.

By a joint resolution approved October 1, 1962, as amended, (76 Stat. 676), the Congress has authorized and requested the President to designate May 15 of each year as "Peace Officers Memorial Day" and the week in which it falls as "Police Week," and by Public Law 103-322, as amended, (36 U.S.C. 136), has directed that the flag be flown at half staff on Peace Officers Memorial Day.

**Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush,** President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 15, 2007, as Peace Officers Memorial Day and May 13 through May 19, 2007, as Police Week. I call on all Americans to observe these events with appropriate ceremonies and activities. I also call on Governors of the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, as well as appropriate officials of all units of government, to direct that the flag be flown at half staff on Peace Officers Memorial Day. I further encourage all Americans to display the flag at half staff from their homes and businesses on that day.